DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 293 575 JC 880 169

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TITLE Quality Assessment in Action.
PUB DATE Jun 87
NOTE 23p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Pennsylvania Community Colleges (June 1987).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS College Planning; Community Colleges; *Educational Assessment; *Educational Quality; *Evaluation Criteria; Evaluation Methods; *Institutional Research; Outcomes of Education; Program Descriptions; *Research Methodology; Self Evaluation (Groups); Two Year Colleges
IDENTIFIERS *Community College of Philadelphia PA

ABSTRACT

In 1985, an ad hoc committee was appointed to conduct a comprehensive examination of the educational effectiveness of the Community College of Philadelphia (CCP). The principles governing the assessment emphasized students' educational goals; cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes; differences among subgroups within the student population; concurrent evaluations of performance indicators, programs and disciplines, and teacher effectiveness; and the use of manageable methodologies yielding timely results. Actions taken under CCP's quality assessment program include: (1) development and implementation of a set of performance indicators (i.e., enrollment, retention, academic performance, post-CCP outcomes, and efficiency measures) were developed and implemented for all disciplines; (2) creation of new goal statements for new and continuing students to aid in outcomes assessment; (3) administration of a general academic assessment test to a cross-section of CCP students; (4) assessment of student gains in self-concept; (5) reconstruction of the program and discipline audit process; (6) construction of a comprehensive retention database, including a wide range of demographic, personal background, and academic data on all entering students; and (7) conduct of current and former student surveys to assess student progress toward their educational goals. Elements fundamental to the success of CCP's assessment program have been the support from the college president, efforts to balance positive and negative findings, methodological emphases on finding causal relationships, and faculty involvement. (EJV)

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QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN ACTION

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INTRODUCTION

I have been asked to speak about a quality assessment program in action--what we did to begin to understand areas of institutional effectiveness and ineffectiveness. My report today is very much about work in progress. After several false starts, we have started down a road which we believe will result in critical information essential to planning future institutional directions. We have already learned some important things about the College. There is much more we need to know.

My presentation is going to cover three areas:

A. How we decided that educational effectiveness should be measured at CCP.
   - The conceptual model supporting our research.
   - Assumptions and organizational considerations which have significantly impacted on the approach we are using.

B. What we are specifically doing to assess quality and some indications of institutional impacts our findings are having.

C. Challenges we have encountered and some future directions that we hope to take.

I had the opportunity to attend the October, 1986 ETS Invitational Conference on "Assessing the Outcomes of Higher Education." That conference and the resulting proceedings did a remarkably comprehensive job of summarizing the leadership and research issues which must be resolved to do an effective job of assessing institutional performance. If you are serious about proceeding further with quality assessment initiatives, I would urge to send for the Proceedings. Several of the issues I am going to cover briefly were addressed in more detail by one or more of the presenters.

I. HOW WE DECIDED TO BEGIN TO ASSESS EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

One of the challenges in starting a quality assessment initiative is the varying notions which different constituents have about effectiveness. Areas where effectiveness measures can be collected include:

Financial Effectiveness (program cost, faculty credit

hour productivity, average class size, indirect cost containment, etc.)

Enrollment Effectiveness (ability to achieve enrollment targets, extent to which programs reach all appropriate populations in service area)

Community Impact (economic impact on community, e.g., contribution to local GNP, extent to which employer manpower needs are met, employer assessment of program quality)

Educational Effectiveness-Institutional Perspective - Are institutional expectations for graduates in areas such as basic skills, general education, and program specific competencies being achieved?

Educational Effectiveness - Student Perspective - Are students leaving the institution having achieved the education and personal goals they had when they enrolled at the college?

In 1985, CCP's President, Judith Eaton, appointed an ad hoc task force charged to look comprehensively at issue of educational effectiveness. We were to begin a series of studies which would provide a basis of understanding of institutional strengths and weaknesses, and would point toward ways that institutional effectiveness could be enhanced. After a series of extended (and painful) discussions, we determined that our

institutional assessment would be guided by the following principles:

Principle 1. A primary emphasis would be placed on educational effectiveness measured from both the College's and the student's perspective.

Principle 2. That a significant effort would be placed on understanding student's educational goals at the time they first enrolled, and in understanding how they changed while they were at the College. Effectiveness would then be assessed in part based upon the relationship between students' educational goals and what they achieved.

Principle 3. That educational effectiveness studies needed to focus on both cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes for students.

- We felt that growth in the areas such as self-concept and the development of independent learning capabilities were as important to know about as cognitive development in generic skills and disciplines.

Principle 4. That measures of educational effectiveness would be analyzed and reported by student subpopulation with the expectation that, to be effective as an institution, we would not have to have the same performance for all student groups.

- An easy example of this was the expectation that the percentage of students successfully transferring from our Engineering Science program would be higher than that from our secretarial science program and vice versa for post-CCP employment.
- A more difficult, and still unresolved, issue was associated with effectiveness measures for students who enter the College via one of our pre-College remedial programs. Remedial students are more likely than others to have enrollment goals that are inconsistent with abilities. Thus, their goals may not be always be appropriate as a standard for measuring institution's effectiveness. Further, there is no consensus within the institution about the College's expectations for remedial students. Stated somewhat simply--Is our primary goal to prepare students to take college-level courses--or is it to give these students the educational assistance they need (in whatever form) to get on with their lives?
- As Peter stated yesterday, there are a wide range of student subpopulations with unique goals and educational needs. Assessment needs to address each separately.

Principle 5. That assessment efforts would proceed along several parallel, but complementary, tracks.

Track A. Creation of a series of across-the-board performance indicators that would provide common information for all programs and disciplines at the College.

- The performance indicators address enrollment and financial effectiveness as well as educational effectiveness.
- We anticipate that a key role for the performance indicators will be to serve as an alert to areas of the institution where further assessment is warranted.

Track B. Significant improvement to the periodic program and discipline evaluation process.

- Here one of our primary emphases was on creating an evaluation process with substantial departmental faculty involvement in identifying, researching, and making recommendations on critical issues related to institutional effectiveness.

Track C. Institutional Research studies to describe the effectiveness of the College in a number of key areas. Examples of some research issues we are currently working on include:

- Retention patterns and variables associated with retention/non-retention.

- Contributions of the College to student growth in selected cognitive and non-cognitive areas.
- Relative effectiveness of various components of the College's educational programs and student services from a current and former student perspective.
- Students' educational goals upon enrolling at the College and subsequent goal achievement.
- Impact of CCP on former student's experiences in the labor market or at transfer institutions.

Fourth Track We Felt Important

Classroom-based research that focuses on the effectiveness of the individual teacher.

- Pat Cross at the ETS Conference argued forcefully for classroom-based assessment as an essential complement to institutional assessment.
- I wish I could report a broad institutional commitment to classroom-based assessment. Not surprisingly, most faculty remain concerned about allowing researchers into their classroom. However, we have had several smaller-scale initiatives which demonstrated that, under ideal conditions, faculty members are willing to look

critically at their instructional approaches and modify them based upon an honest assessment of student experiences in the classroom.

A critical characteristic of all of our classroom-based assessment activities has been that they were largely initiated by concerned faculty who, in turn, co-opted other faculty into participation. Institutional Research has been involved only to the extent of providing technical assistance upon request.

Principle 6. Our final principle related to methodology. We believed the methodology should be manageable and result in timely information. Two technical considerations have been important in our assessment efforts.

First. We are relying heavily upon student judgments of educational effectiveness. As the ultimate beneficiaries (or victims) of our programs, we believe the students have critical information to give us about our effectiveness.

Second. We believe that cross-sectional studies, where we look simultaneously at attitudes and outcomes of student cohorts at various stages in their education, can provide

meaningful information. Longitudinal studies, where one group of students is studied over time, are important and sometimes more compelling in the richness of information they provide--but the timeliness and usefulness of information available from cross-sectional approaches makes them important to our efforts.

II. WHAT HAVE WE ACTUALLY DONE TO DATE AND SOME KEY IMPACTS FROM OUR EFFORTS

A. Developed and implemented a set of all-college performance indicators

This activity has facilitated the program evaluation process by providing a common data base. Is also helping to identify critical trends at the discipline or program level that require special scrutiny and/or further analysis.

B. Designed and implemented a new student goal statement as well as introduced a continuing student goal statement

This has identified the types of enrollment goals which students are able to achieve and pointed to other areas where student progress has been less satisfactory. Provides a firmer basis on which to assess student outcomes, e.g., students enrolling to take a

few courses at the request of an employer should not be expected to graduate.

C. Administered a general education assessment test to a cross-section of CCP students

This effort demonstrated faculty willingness to participate in a general testing program. Has highlighted some areas of the College's general education experience which appears to be relatively weak (e.g., general knowledge in the Humanities).

D. Assessed student gains in the area of self-concept

Consistent with other research, demonstrated the importance of placing students in a structured curricular experience with close faculty ties, if student growth in non-cognitive areas is to be strongly encouraged. Has provided additional support for our current effort to restructure our large general studies program.

E. Redesigned the program and discipline audit Process

The audits have become formative as opposed to summative in nature looking critically at needed curricular and instructional changes, as opposed to being largely summative and self-applauding in nature.

F. Constructed a comprehensive Retention Data Base which contains a wide range of demographic, personal background, and academic data on every single student which has entered the College on- and off-campus over the last eight years.

Although conceptually routine, this has proved to be a massive data processing challenge. We have 120,000 students on the file with over 100 variables on each student. We had to pull data from literally hundreds of different files.

- We can now unambiguously chart the progress of all students through the College including off-campus students for whom we historically have had limited information.
- The file makes it possible for us to load a rich set of variables for all respondents to survey research so that we look at the relationships between entering goals, race, sex, SES, remedial program status, etc., and post-CCP outcomes. This is important to us because of the increasing emphasis we are placing on why something happened as opposed to just what happened. We have assembled a data set appropriate for causal modeling techniques such as path analysis and Lisrel.

G. Initiated a current student survey and redesigned the former student surveys to gather much more detailed information on students' progress toward accomplishment of their goals for enrolling at the College, and to have a more detailed assessment of various aspects of the College.

For a range of student subpopulations, we have identified components of the institution that are relatively less effective. This, in turn, has helped us set some priorities for strengthening curricula and support services.

III. FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND CHALLENGES

Russell Edgerton, President of AAHE, at the ETS Invitational Conference stressed the long road that has to be followed to design and implement a meaningful assessment model. As he said, "The quick fix just isn't in the cards." When we started our efforts over 2 1/2 years ago, we:

- underestimated the measurement complexity of some of the effectiveness dimensions we wanted to explore;
- underestimated the technical complexities associated with installing and accessing a large complex

longitudinal data base;

- overestimated the degree of sophistication at other colleges and universities that we thought we could turn to for help;
- overestimated the amount of interest our non-research-oriented colleagues would have in our efforts to improve our understanding of institutional effectiveness..

We realize now that we are involved in a long-term project where each set of research findings will raise new questions and point the way to additional research initiatives.

There are several considerations which I believe are fundamental to the successful implementation of a quality assessment effort:

1. The strong interest, support and conceptual collaboration from our President has been the key to our ability to sustain this assessment effort. To undertake a comprehensive institutional assessment project requires a significant commitment of staff time

and resources without any immediate tangible results. Patience and a tolerance for ambiguous information are fundamental to getting through the first years of a quality assessment program.

2. The assessment process needs to balance the positive and the negatives. It's important the assessment program be designed to look honestly at institutional deficiencies, but it should also provide a vehicle for highlighting institutional strengths and accomplishments. Deciding on the balance between these two perspectives is an important on-going consideration in developing an assessment model.

3. To the extent possible, research methodologies should focus on attempting to establish causal relationships as opposed to simply describing what happened. Possible approaches to strengthening curricula and services the College should flow directly from the assessment data.

4. As the College develops and refines its expectations for students in higher order academic skills such as critical literacy, it is important that the expectations be stated in such a way that student achievement of them can be assessed. All too frequently I feel we are guilty of stating educational niceties as our goals with little or no attention paid to how these vague goals would be incorporated into curricular design and assessment strategies. We need to avoid the "if we say it's important, we must be doing it" syndrome.

5. Faculty should be fully involved in the designing, implementing and using the results of the assessment process. However, in designing institutional change strategies with respect to quality assessment, many faculty and staff are better in a reacting mode than they are in a role of initially creating the process. Knowledgeable researchers on campus must play a

leadership role in suggesting assessment strategies. The challenge is to identify the key junctures for involvement in a way that allows good ideas to be captured and encourages ownership in the findings.

As I said at the beginning, this is very much a report on work in progress. With our work to date, we feel we have laid a foundation for a meaningful quality assessment program. What we are able to build upon this foundation, what our ultimate institutional impact turns out to be, will very much depend on how well we resolve some of these latter issues.

APPENDIX I

COMPARABLE PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The data shown in the following five sections are collected annually for all programs and/or disciplines at the College. Where appropriate, institutional averages and norms are computed to serve as a frame of reference for looking at a particular program or discipline. Assuming appropriate database coding, any measure shown in the performance indicators may be computed for race, sex and age subpopulations.

A. ENROLLMENT PATTERNS

Program Only

FTE enrollment - all students by term, annual

FTE enrollment - new students by term, annual

Headcount - new students enrolled

Headcount - full-time students

Total petitioners by term and year

Total new student applications received by term and year

% of new student applications received that enrolled by term and year

New student and petitioner headcount as % of new student enrollment goal

Headcount - petitioners enrolled by term and year

FTE - petitioners enrolled by term and year

Percent of headcount - new students entering at remedial, under-prepared and college-ready levels

Discipline Only

Headcount - all second-level courses

Headcount - by course

Both Discipline & Program

% of students having sophomore status

B. RETENTION PATTERNS

Program Only

Number of graduates by year

Number of graduates relative to students new to program per year

Number of returning students divided by new students per term and by year

Number of students who left with under 30 credits as a percentage of mean number of new and petition students - prior three years

Number of graduates as a percentage of mean number of new and petitioning students in prior three years

% of total headcount not graduating who returned next term (excluding summer)

% of headcount who have completed 24+ credits

Discipline Only

Percentage withdrawing by course

Number of advanced-level course students divided by first semester course students

C. ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE PATTERNS

Program Only

Median GPA - all students

Median GPA - first-time students

Median GPA - sophomore students

Median GPA - freshmen students

Number dropped for poor scholarship by term

Number dropped for poor progress by term

Number on academic probation due to poor scholarship

Number on academic probation due to poor progress

Mean value of credits earned divided by credits attempted

% of annual headcount enrollment dropped for academic standards reasons

% of annual headcount enrollment placed on probation for academic standards reasons

% of sophomore students having earned a passing grade in ENGL 102

% of graduates who were not initially degree-oriented

% of leavers who were initially degree-oriented

Discipline Only

% of students receiving a passing grade by course

D. POST-CCP OUTCOMES PATTERNS

Program Only

% graduates employed

% graduates employed in related field

% graduates transferring

% graduates unemployed & seeking work

% leavers employed

% leavers employed in related field

% leavers transferring

% leavers unemployed & seeking work

% leavers and graduates indicating educational goals were accomplished at the College

% indicating satisfaction with overall CCP experience

In order to have a reasonable sample size, data in this section may be reported for the last three consecutive years with earliest year dropped and new year added each time data is compiled.

E. EFFICIENCY MEASURES

Program Only

Program cost

Program cost as a % of mean institutional program cost

Discipline Only

Average class size

Discipline cost

Discipline cost as a % of institutional mean discipline cost

Mean student credit hour taught per FTE faculty

Average class size as a % of maximum average class size possible

Average productivity as a % of maximum average productivity

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